

Introduction to the Symposium

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The term "hidden disabilities" can refer both to disabilities that are relatively invisible as well as to disabilities that we may choose to hide. When David Pfeiffer requested symposium topics for *Disability Studies Quarterly* (DSQ) I immediately suggested an issue on Hidden Disabilities. In developing the Call for Submissions I then had to evaluate why I had chosen that topic and what I hoped authors would discuss. In the Call I suggested that topics might include (but were not limited to) the following:

Politics and Policies: What "counts" as evidence of disability in social policies, in disability rights organizations, in disability studies?

Hidden disabilities and Everyday Life: experiences of living with a hidden disability; pressures to hide and/or disclose; comparisons between relatively visible and invisible disabilities. Links between the personal and the social, historical, and political.

Dualisms and Disability: Are the dualisms that have often been used to describe and compare aspects of disability (form/function, visible/invisible, congenital/acquired, etc.) meaningful and useful? If so, how and for whom? If not, why not?

Disability Culture and Hidden Disabilities: How do we share what we cannot see? What are the bases for developing common cultural experiences?

The theme of Hidden Disabilities reflected intellectual, political, and personal concerns which, while distinct, often overlap in everyday life. I should not have been surprised therefore when the submissions for this special issue also integrated scholarship, experience, and activism.

Yet several qualities did surprise me. First, authors overwhelmingly told or incorporated their own stories. This was true both for those who submitted papers as well as those who made inquiries, but for one reason or another did not send in a manuscript. The topic Hidden Disabilities has not often been addressed explicitly in scholarly research as an overarching theme. More often articles about particular conditions (pain, diabetes, learning disabilities, etc.) are scattered throughout publications. Here authors had an opportunity to share their research, their writing in one volume. However, their enthusiasm went beyond sharing research results and getting published. Many authors were eager to have a legitimate space to let their voice, and the voices of others with hidden disabilities, be heard. Risk, disclosure, legitimacy, empowerment are themes that connect the papers throughout this volume. DSQ, and disability studies generally, can foster and promote multidisciplinary scholarship that challenges us to reexamine boundaries: disciplinary, cultural, political, personal.

Second, we could easily have done an entire volume on disability and academe. Several authors are either disabled faculty members or graduate students. In writing about interactions with others on campus, authors raise questions about "who counts" as a disabled person. From impression management to job attainment/career advancement authors highlight issues of oppression and subordination. They also examine the uncertainty of living as if in two worlds: disabled/nondisabled, "out" and "in". Please note the emphasis in the previous sentence on "as if." As the articles on embodiment demonstrate, our lived experience is more complex than dualisms such as disabled/nondisabled can capture.

I have organized the papers in this volume in three major groups that focus on (1) everyday life and embodiment; (2) work and work policies; and (3) personal and political social change. Throughout the issue I have included essays and poetry that highlight themes covered in the research papers.

Third, I was thrilled to receive submissions from countries other than the U.S. (including Australia, the U.K., and Canada). The papers also cover a range of hidden disabilities including: learning disabilities, pain, mobility related disabilities, mental illness, TMJ, vision impairment, multiple chemical sensitivity, post-traumatic stress, chronic fatigue syndrome, and traumatic brain injury. Gender is a theme in many articles and two articles explicitly address race and ethnicity. In examining both the structure and content of this issue we see how much there is to learn about hidden disabilities.

I view this special issue as a beginning, however, not an end. Here is my wish list for future articles in DSQ and future dialogues in disability studies.

Explicit theoretical and descriptive comparisons of hidden/non-hidden disabilities;

Examination of how people define chronic illness in relation to disability;

More inclusion and comparison of additional social characteristics such as race, ethnicity, sexual preference, class, religion. For example, how is coming out as a disabled person similar to and different from coming out as a gay or lesbian?

Further elaboration of social policy, politics, disability rights, and disability culture.

We need to push ourselves, as scholars and activists, to examine our own definitions and assumptions: who is to be counted as what, by whom, and for what purposes?

Finally, a note on the history of DSQ and this special issue. When Irving K. Zola initiated this publication he called it the *Journal on Chronic Illness and Disability*. In the early 1980s he responded to suggestions that he remove the term "chronic illness" from the title. Irv felt that for the time being it was essential to reach as wide an audience as possible. Many people with chronic illnesses, and those who study chronic illness, did not necessarily equate the term with disability. Irv hoped to draw them to the journal, to show by example. Thus he hoped not only to expand readership, but also consciousness.

When he felt the time was appropriate, Irv changed the name to *Disability Studies Quarterly*. Irv may have been overly optimistic about raised consciousness both within and outside disability communities. Criticism of medical definitions of disability, for example, may be interpreted as criticisms of people's medically labeled disabilities. Certainly the medical model imposes a limited, oppressive, and paternalistic view of disability. Yet, the labels are meaningful and not always in negative ways. As the articles in this issue demonstrate, such labels often give what can not be seen a kind of legitimacy. We can and should critically examine the nature of that legitimacy. For example, why is medical evidence in western culture viewed as true by social agencies and others? Why have disability insurance programs in the U.S. historically found it more difficult to deal with disabilities that do not have a clear medical label? Can we blame individuals for wanting to use such labels in their everyday lives in order to further social interaction and relative power? We need further systematic study of how what some view as co-optation others view as validation. We need to understand to what extent Irv's hope has been realized and to what extent people still equate chronic illnesses as "not disability."

I would like to thank all of the contributors for their submissions and enthusiasm. I would especially like to thank David Pfeiffer for his support of this issue and his stewardship of DSQ. He and Richard Scotch have patiently dealt with uncertainties of file transmissions, different formats, and the vagaries of the symposium editor's life.

In closing, I dedicate this issue of DSQ in honor and in memory of Phyllis Rubenfeld. (Elaine Makas and Sigi Shapiro will contribute their remarks on the life of Phyllis Rubenfeld in the Fall 2000 issue of DSQ.) Over the last 10 years Phyllis and I developed a relationship based on openness, intellectual curiosity, passion, and respect. We certainly did not always agree, but we learned to listen to each other. Many of our discussions centered on questions of disability experience, identity politics, and teaching disability studies. Our discussions inspired the suggestion for this special issue.